



The House of Cartier is not an antique dealer, it is a contemporary watch and jewellery Maison, with a legacy spanning an incredible 160 years, it is impossible not to draw inspiration from the past and marvel at their masterpieces. Cartier's heritage provides a distinguished backdrop, giving context to its current creations.

Photos: © Cartier

Cartier Tradition

Formidable roots

Maison Cartier was established in 1847 by Louis-François Cartier and was initially a retail store. In 1899 Cartier opened its flagship store in Paris at 13 Rue de la Paix. The Maison had already gained an extensive international following, with clients visiting Cartier from as far afield as Russia and from as early on as the 1870s and 1880s. Cartier was also a favourite amongst English royalty and, with a growing English clientele who were making special trips to Paris to visit Cartier it soon became obvious that they needed to open a store in London. The London store opened in 1902 and a New York store in 1909. There was also a representative office in St Petersburg at the time, until the revolution forced its closure. The Cartier style started developing after 1900, when Louis Cartier joined his father Alfred in the company. He and his brothers would have an enormous impact on the Maison. Along with a number of their employees, the Cartier brothers travelled extensively during this period, visiting countries like the Persian Gulf, Hong Kong, India. This was no easy task, with global travel being hazardous, slow and expensive. The brothers though, were expanding their business and opening new frontiers for Cartier. From the late 1960s to the early 1970s the company was sold off to different branches, but today it has been re-united and is a wholly owned subsidiary of Compagnie Financière Richemont SA, maintaining its headquarters in Paris. Stanislas de Quercize is the current President and CEO of Cartier International.

Guardians of the past

Cartier is not simply an iconic Maison, but a historical and cultural institution. Its guardians have carefully preserved records of years of exquisite craftsmanship in their archives, allowing Bernhard Berger - Director of Cartier Tradition - and his colleagues in Geneva, Paris and New York to assess and validate the

authenticity and provenance of Cartier pieces across the globe. The Cartier Tradition department purchases and sells Cartier collector's items, most of which were conceptualised and created before 1975. The vintage jewellery, watches and precious items are sought after by a sophisticated clientele who seek exclusive pieces for their private collections. In addition the team participates in completing the Cartier Collection, built up over the past three decades and comprising today over 1450 pieces. Its cultural importance brought it to the attention of museums and, since the first major exhibition in 1989 at the Petit Palais in Paris, the Cartier Collection has been shown to the public in retrospectives at more than 20 of the world's foremost institutions. They include the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the British Museum in London, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon, the Kremlin Museum in Moscow, and the Palace Museum inside the Forbidden City in Beijing. Today, some of Cartier's modern jewellery designs are influenced by the past. Berger enjoys being involved with creative projects. He says that while Cartier does receive requests to produce copies of heritage pieces, they never copy their own pieces, though inspiration is sometimes drawn from items within the Cartier Collection. During the creative process, there is often research based on architectural notes or a collection of ornaments drawn from Cartier's archives. The designs are then updated for a more contemporary audience.





Highly desirable collectables

Cartier vintage jewellery and watches are highly desirable collectables. Cartier, while remaining active in the trade, is also careful to ensure that the Cartier name is not misused. There has been a rise in the number of items of questionable authenticity, or pieces which have undergone significant "foreign" alterations, being offered for sale in the trade, by antique dealers and at auction. To safeguard their loyal clients, Cartier is the only authority that can provide a valid guarantee of authenticity, quality and condition of its creations, past and present. Cartier Tradition purchases many pieces from current and former clients and their descendants and also acquires from within the trade. While purchases are still made on auction, this is becoming less common as there are fewer pieces going through the auction houses today. This is due in part to the limited number of pieces created by Cartier, but also because many of the original pieces pre-dating World War I were dismantled, the stones re-used in more fashionable designs. Each vintage piece sold by Cartier Tradition, is accompanied by a certificate of authenticity, which is based upon the expertise of Cartier's Heritage special-

ists, whose expertise and meticulous archive research allows them to validate it. For those pieces requiring restoration, Cartier's team of experienced and highly specialised craftsmen are on hand to return them to their former glory.

Provenance

While it is not always possible to trace the exact lineage of each piece, many having been sold and having changed hands between the wars, the Cartier Tradition team do their best to identify the individual pieces by tracing them through Cartier's extensive private archives. These archives are stored in Paris, London and New York and they list each piece produced by the company from its beginning. The list lies in a collection of extremely detailed, precious books that provide an account of the Maison's daily activities.

Each exquisite creation is carefully documented, all the way from the workshops through to its sale. Each of the three historic Maisons; Paris, London and New York, have their own archives and dedicated archivists. The oldest surviving archives which have remained intact

and are an almost entirely complete record are found in Paris and date back to the beginning of the 20th century. The oldest surviving records date back to 1850 and from 1906, each piece has been systematically photographed before being shipped and these pictures accompany the records. There are nearly 40,000 negatives in the Paris collection of which roughly 30,000 are on gelatine-bromide glass plates.

"The history of the company is so rich, even for us, who work there all day, every day - we're still discovering things we haven't seen before," says Berger.

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Cartier in Sandton City, Johannesburg, recently hosted an exhibition of 55 vintage pieces from the Heritage Collection. Among the exquisite pieces of jewellery were a selection of 20th century watches and clocks. Of particular interest were a "Tank" Bracelet watch designed by Cartier in Paris in 1944, (one of only 67 sold that year including all available Tank models) and a so-called "Normal Tank" platinum wrist-watch produced in 1928 (one of only 68 sold that year, including all available Tank models, of which a small part were platinum). Those who prefer a larger watch-face would be tempted by the sleek lines of the "Large Oval" wrist-watch designed by Cartier New York in 1971. Berger, who accompanied the exhibition, explains that there are very few rings available as they are not often sold but rather passed on within a family, or reset with the stones removed and remodelled into more contemporary settings. One of the few on display though, was the delicate yellow-gold and ruby buckle ring, designed by Cartier London in 1959. It would make a beautiful addition to any personal collection. The Ribbon bow "Cravat" necklace, designed by Cartier Paris in 1907, is a delightful garland style creation. It perfectly illustrates the use of platinum to achieve lightness in design and ensures that nothing detracts from the cascade of diamonds and pearls in this delicate Edwardian piece. If you are seeking an impact piece then the cluster necklace made by Cartier London in 1964, will steal your heart. While not the most valuable piece in the collection, it is a particularly striking display of Citrine Quartz in wonderful honey-coloured hues.

Whether it is the design or the provenance of the piece that entices you, there is no mistaking the sublime aesthetics, expert craftsmanship and exceptional attention to detail that is Maison Cartier. The House has traversed the centuries to grow into the illustrious company that it is today, managing successfully preserve its rich history along the way. ■ Lindsay Grubb

"The jeweller of kings and the king of jewellers."
- King Edward VII

